

Prices keep rising for Montgomery County schools

School system asking for \$3M to replace aging units

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Rising construction costs tack about 20 percent onto each project Montgomery County Public Schools builds, and there's no re-

lief in sight, officials say.

Even an expected \$2.1 million request for portable classroom work rose to nearly \$4 million by the time it made it to the County Council's education committee Thursday.

"It's an election year. Of course the money will be approved," quipped committee chairman Mike Subin, D-at large.

The school system is asking for \$3 million to purchase portable classrooms and replace or elim-

inate aging units. The request would reduce the total number of trailers from 719 to 597 by the beginning of the next school year. The other \$1 million requested would provide 12 more portables,

expand to the 18 schools still operating on a half-day schedule.

The committee also considered a request for an additional \$3 million to renovate the former Arcola Elementary School, now closed. The project was originally funded

at more than \$15 million, but contractors would not bid at that level, said school facilities chief Richard Hawes.

An upcoming auditorium addition to Walter Johnson High School is expected to run over budget for the same reasons, he said.

"We predicted this last fall, based on what the market was doing," Hawes said. "A lot of these projects were funded back in 2003."

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